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Report on the activities of the Office of Internal Oversight Services

Administrative and budgetary aspects of the financing of the United Nations peacekeeping operations

Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services Part two: peacekeeping operations

Note by the Secretary-General

Addendum

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit for the consideration of the General Assembly his comments on part two of the annual report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (A/61/264 (Part II)).

Summary

Part two of the annual report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services covers the peacekeeping oversight activities of the Office during the 18-month period from 1 July 2005 to 30 December 2006. In the present document, the Secretary-General provides comments on issues that the Administration considers to require clarification.

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I. Introduction

1. The recommendations of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) are welcomed, and every effort will be made to ensure their full implementation. Clarifications on specific issues for the information of Member States are provided below.

II. Comments on specific paragraphs of the report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services

Comprehensive audits related to peacekeeping
(para. 5)

2. While there is an appearance of duplication or overlap in the functions performed by Political Affairs Officers in the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Political Affairs, including the fact that their job descriptions are similar, the OIOS report does not make it clear that the officers in both Departments carry out different functions. The tasks of the Political Officers of the Department of Political Affairs relate to: missions for which that Department is responsible; and also the monitoring of the wider regional political issues in areas where the Department of Peacekeeping Operations has operations. In this regional role, the Department of Political Affairs provides a "foreign ministry" capacity/support to the Office of the Secretary-General. The officers of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, on the other hand, focus on specific locations/countries where operations led by that Department are located, and on the specific requirements of the mandates of peacekeeping missions.

Internal control and accountability
(para. 7)

3. Accountability cannot be measured solely by referrals to disciplinary processes. Programme managers have acted in accordance with the norms of the United Nations system of justice in holding staff accountable for misconduct and mismanagement by submitting cases to OIOS for investigation, where matters warranted such action, followed by referral to the Office of Human Resources Management in instances where disciplinary action was considered necessary. In other cases, an administrative response was more appropriate and action was taken through performance appraisals and administrative censure. With the establishment of Conduct and Discipline Teams at Headquarters and in missions, programme managers are further provided with policy guidance and technical advice in addressing cases of misconduct.

Mismanagement
(para. 19)

4. While the specifics of the investigation conducted by OIOS are not disputed, the report does not make the basis of reimbursement clear. Troop-contributing countries are not reimbursed based on the frequency of tasking/activities or the percentage of vehicles used to perform the required activities, as implied in the investigation finding. The troop-contributing countries are reimbursed based on signed memorandums of understanding and confirmation received from the missions

that contingent-owned equipment deployed is maintained in a serviceable condition. The quantity of equipment included in the memorandums of understanding is determined by the operational requirements and is mutually agreed between the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the troop-contributing countries.

Procurement task force
(para. 32)

5. It is noted that in this instance the Task Force found no evidence of fraud, corruption or favouritism on the part of the two staff members in supervisory positions. The staff members in question have been given the opportunity to respond to the report of the Task Force and have done so. The comments of the staff members concerned are under consideration to determine what action, if any, will be required.

Procurement audits
(para. 45)

6. Of the 12 cases cited, six were for the leasing of premises/property established during the initial deployment of the Mission to accommodate troops and to serve as office accommodation and warehouse facilities. The cost of leasing the premises $6,575,000 represents 72 per cent of the total expenditure of $9.1 million on procurement. In accordance with the United Nations Financial Rules and Regulations, competitive bidding does not apply to the acquisition of real estate where market conditions do not allow for effective competition. The premises were identified on the basis of location, size, compliance with minimum operational security standards, and other factors meeting operational requirements, and secured by means of a negotiated procurement process. All cases were subsequently approved by the Headquarters Committee on Contracts, which identified no procurement irregularities in them. Two other cases, also originating from the start-up phase of the Mission, in the amount of $2,320,076, related to the award of rental and servicing of portable toilets to the only two firms identified as capable of providing the required services.

Mission appointments through the Department of Peacekeeping Operations Succession Planning Panel
(para. 54)

7. The Department of Peacekeeping Operations has addressed the shortcomings noted by OIOS by the establishment, in 2006, of a Departmental policy and dedicated capacity to manage senior leadership appointments.

Recruitment of field staff
(paras. 56 and 57)

8. While the Department of Peacekeeping Operations is in general agreement with the findings relating to recruitment of field staff, neither the underlying causes of the high vacancy rates nor the efforts made over the course of 2006 to address the persistent challenges to fill vacancies in field missions have been acknowledged in the report of OIOS. Despite processing between 2,000 and 2,500 selections per year over the past two years, mission vacancy rates continue to hover between 22 and 28 per cent. Missions face a persistent 30 per cent turnover per year in professional

positions, with more than 50 per cent of professional mission staff having experience of two years or less in United Nations peace operations. The human resources management reform proposals set out in the report of the Secretary-General, "Investing in people" (A/61/255 and Add.1 and Add.1/Corr.1) seek to address inadequacies in the conditions of service of field staff. The proposals include offering increased job security through the introduction of one United Nations staff contract under one set of Staff Rules, the designation of missions as family or non-family, based on the security phase, and the harmonization of conditions of service for staff serving in non-family duty stations with those of the United Nations agencies, funds and programmes.

9. A number of initiatives have already been taken by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations to better manage the recruitment and staffing processes. The recruitment, outreach and roster management functions have been set apart from the staff selection process. They are now performed by an independent team dedicated to posting vacancies, screening applications, conducting reference checks and preliminary interviews to assess interest, suitability and availability and to maintaining updated rosters of highly qualified candidates available for deployment to the field. The Recruitment and Outreach Unit now conducts targeted recruitment campaigns to identify qualified candidates for difficult-to-fill profiles in response to identified mission needs or trends in human resources requirements and/or to improve gender and geographical representation. The Department has also redesigned the Galaxy website to enable the continuous posting of all vacancies to enable applicants to identify, at all times, the post levels and location(s) where they would like to serve. The deployment of "tiger teams" (temporary reinforcement of the Civilian Personnel Section of missions by staff of the Personnel Management and Support Service) with delegated recruitment authority to missions at their start-up or expansion phases have proven to be highly successful in reducing vacancy rates at such critical stages.